

# LIMERICK SOCIALIST

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THE  
VOICE  
OF THE  
WORKER

That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic

James Connolly

50th. Number

SOCIALIST



THE SOCIALIST MARCHES ON

**PART  
FOURTEEN**

**BY  
P. J. RYAN**

### THE STATERS MOVE IN

When open warfare began in Dublin against the Provisional Government, units of the National Army in various towns in County Limerick were attacked. In Adare the garrison was attacked and surrendered. On instructions, all other units converged on Coolbawn House, Castleconnell where they remained for some time. While the shooting was going on in Dublin, General Michael Collins arrived at Coolbawn House. He rebuked the Commanders for their lack of initiative and inspected the men. Collins addressed the men, ending his address with — "Go in and take that city". On the following morning, the companies marched on Limerick city; it was a forced march at a rapid pace.

It can be noted that when a company marches in a hurry it presents an appearance of being actively aggressive. The men are likewise imbued with a feeling of hostility towards the cause of their enforced activity; this may have been the reason why they were not attacked on their march to the city.

There were many hostile elements in their line of march who were capable of destroying bridges and other acts of sabotage. The distance from Coolbawn to the city is about six miles. On the route the companies could have been attacked by snipers and ambushers. They could have been held up at Annacotty Bridge over the Mulcair river and at Groody Bridge they were open to attack all the way to the city. They had not an advance guard or a rear guard, nor were their flanks protected.

Geographically Limerick city consists of some few little hills bounded by the Shannon and some swampy lowland. This swampy lowland is drained by the river Groody, the creek at Ballinacurra and the Barnakyle. Outside of these are the Maigue and Mulcair rivers. All of these rivers enter the Shannon. In a wet year most of the lowland became covered with water, making the city an island to be entered only by any of the bridges crossing the rivers. Any military force holding those bridges in 1916 or in 1922, could deny entry to an invading force and hold the city indefinitely. With the departure of General Brennan from the Castle Barrack, the Diehards were in absolute possession of the city.

The greedy child was permitted to keep any sweets which he could take in one attempt from a narrow necked glass jar. In trying to remove a fistful he failed and lost all. The Diehards could have placed their men on the bridges near the city and held out indefinitely against the Staters. Like the boy and the jar of sweets, the Diehards held the four military barracks as a sweet and lovable possession.

The barracks were status symbols. The Diehards assumed that possession of the barracks rendered them immune to attack. They assumed that they could hold the barracks as the British had held them. They forgot or ignored the fact that the British had an armed police force in the city and on its perimeter. The police barracks on the perimeter were located a short distance from the bridges on the various rivers near the city. In grabbing the barracks rather than the bridges, the Diehards gained the prestige and lost the prize.

The Staters entered the city unopposed. The first company was led by Captain Timmy Murphy of Limerick. The second company was led by Captain Lynch of Caherconlish, Co. Limerick. The third company was led by Captain Troy, also from Limerick city.

As the four military barracks were held by the Diehards, the Staters could not occupy them except by force; this they were unable and unwilling to do. Because of their numerical weakness, they could not attack any one of the four barracks. In the event, they would then be attacked by the other three forces.

# The Fourth Siege of Limerick

The Staters represented the lawfully elected Government of the State. Their primary purpose and duty was to protect life and property, not to destroy them. The Diehards had no such authority or concern. Their purpose, as stated by one of their leaders, was "Destruction and terror to make government impossible".

The Staters marched into the city by Clare Street. They took possession of the Custom House and the Courthouse which commanded the North Strand and Strand Barrack across the Shannon. As the four military barracks were occupied by the Diehards, they could not take over any one of them, as they lacked that strength of numbers which makes a take-over bid so happily successful. With commendable modesty and prudence, they were content with a little-a little bit here, a little bit there. They occupied Cruise's Hotel and William Street Barracks and connected the two posts by breaking through the intervening walls. They cut a trench across the road from Cruise's and connected with the buildings opposite. In this manner they broke through the walls of the buildings in Sarsfield Street and reached the Turkish Baths, by the Sarsfield Bridge.

They erected a double barrier across the bridge where the steps led down to the quays below. In this manner they gained control of Sarsfield Bridge and the river Shannon. They could cover the quays with rifle fire as far as Barrington's Pier, over a mile down river and as far as the Castle Barrack and Thomond Bridge up river. They now had cover from fire and cover from view so that none could know if their total forces were concentrated at any one point or were scattered over many points. They took over Mary Street Police Barracks and St. Mary's Cathedral. A party of fifty of their men marched up William Street and Mulgrave Street and took possession of the County Jail, without opposition from the Diehard Garrison in the Ordinance Barrack.

The Staters now held the four symbols of Law and Order and Established Government — the Police Barrack, the Courthouse, the Jail and the Custom House. It now remained to them to make those symbols into a reality.

In a matter of hours, they had established themselves in the city with a line of retreat or a supply line to the east by the Dublin Road, and into Clare by the Corbally Road and the Ennis railway. They now had possession of four of the five bridges in the city and had split the Diehard forces into three parts. The Castle and the Strand Barracks were immobilised and cut off from each other and from contact with the New and the Ordinance Barracks. In four hours they proved the truth of the Arms of the City: "An ancient city studied in the arts of war". All the officers and most of the men involved in this occupation were from Limerick city and county.

Having gained those many points, the Staters prepared to defend them. From Evans' hardware store on the corner of O'Connell Street and Sarsfield Street, they removed rolls of barbed wire, ploughs, harrows and wheel hay rakes; they also removed milk churns and hayforks. With those fearsome weapons, they formed a barrier across O'Connell Street and the Henry Street junction with Sarsfield Street.

With similar implements from Newsom's hardware store in William Street, they barricaded the Wickham, High and William Street junction; they also placed barriers at the head of John Street. The staters now held a semi-circle of territory from Clare Street to Sarsfield Bridge, and bounded by the

# ANOTHER MILESTONE

This is the 50th edition of the "Limerick Socialist". In a front page article, in the first edition of the paper, in January 1972, we wrote:

*The Limerick Socialist Organisation was founded in January 1972 by a group of politically conscious workers, who came together to work in a serious and objective manner for socialism. The need for a strong working class movement in Limerick and throughout Ireland is clear. This Organisation will strive to play its part in building such a movement. The short-term aim of the Organisation will be to increase the*

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

I was interested to read John Casey's article on the current economic crisis in your January issue. I agree with all he has written about unemployment but I believe he has only half stated the case. It is all very well for him to point out how the economic crisis has resulted from the failure to provide a planned economy like the socialist countries in describing how the international market situation has effected us, but a closer look at the social and economic structure that prevails at home provides a more basic example of how the system works.

The Lyons' Report on wealth and the Louis Smith interpretation of this document show that a large percentage of the wealth of the country is vested in an extremely small group of people. On the other hand, approximately 62% of the people have no personal wealth whatsoever. Workers, employed and unemployed, form the majority of this group and also provide the foundation on which the whole oligarchical social and economic pyramid is built.

John Casey argues that the pay-related benefits are being used by the Government to tranquilise the unemployed workers; this is true but he could have added that the money being spent on these benefits was borrowed on the open market at high interest rates. In the long-term, whether the economy improves or not, this huge borrowing will further entomb the workers and retard their economic progress; for, one way or another, the workers will have to finally foot the bill.

One might well ask how this obviously unjust, free-booting, free enterprise society came into existence and how we, the working class, have allowed it to continue. The Irish working class is nowhere near the winter of its discontent but is still firmly entrenched in the spring of its indifference. By our inactivity and silence we collectively encourage the abuses of our present society. We live out our lives according to Scarlett O'Hara's philosophy, "I will think about it - tomorrow".

Austin McCoy  
Santry,  
Dublin.

*political consciousness of Limerick workers through regular meetings and discussions and through the pages of the "Limerick Socialist". We have no illusions about our task. We realise that this work will be slow and difficult, but with correct and principled working methods it can be achieved. It is understandable that because of its historical development the working class in Limerick is politically weak and unsure of its role in asserting its power. It is only through concentrated study and struggle that the more advanced of the workers can come to understand the historical role of the working class and give the leadership necessary for political advancement. The long-term aim of the Organisation will be to work in co-operation with other working class organisations in playing its part to bring about a socialist society.*

For the past fifty months, the "Limerick Socialist" has appeared regularly and its influence is now deeply rooted in the local working class. For the first time, a Limerick political paper, backed by a group of politically conscious workers, has consistently put forward the socialist case. For the first time, the nationalist interpretation of Irish history has been successfully challenged and a working class alternative presented in its place. For the first time, the influence of nationalist groups among Limerick workers has been effectively countered and these groups have now been relegated to the periphery of working class politics in the city.

Over the last four years the Organisation has given leadership to Limerick workers on all political matters effecting their lives. In June 1974, Jim Kemmy, chairman of the Organisation, went forward as the first socialist candidate ever to contest the local government elections in Limerick. He was elected on the first count with 1,275 votes, fourth highest in the city. In his work as a Councillor, Kemmy has refused to be shackled by the conservative conventions of the three main political parties and has insisted on putting forward the working class position on all possible occasions, even when constantly confronted with the united opposition of the City Council and its officials.

In the local trade union movement, the influence of the Organisation has also been felt in bringing about a more realistic awareness to the Northern Ireland conflict, in the development of policies to combat the problem of unemployment and on many other issues. This work culminated in the election of Jim Kemmy to the presidency of the Limerick Council of Trade Unions in the period 1973-1975.

On a social democratic level, the Organisation has taken the initiative in holding two public meetings on the subject of birth control and has led the way in the work of establishing the first family planning clinic in Limerick.

This edition is also another milestone in the history of local working class and political journalism. With this issue, the "Limerick Socialist" becomes the longest running paper of its kind in the city. The first workers' broadsheet "Bottom Dog" was first published on 20th October, 1917 and continued until the 1st November 1918. In this period, 48 editions of the "Dog" were published. Another workers' paper, "The Worker" appeared on the 8th June, 1918, published by the Delegate Board of the Limerick Mechanics' Institute. The second (known) edition of this paper was published on June 22nd, but after this "The Worker" seems to have folded.

Shannon and Abbey rivers which they now controlled. Into this territory could come supplies and reinforcements from Clare and North Tipperary. All this militant activity was accomplished in some hours without firing an angry shot.

These things having been done, the Staters looked for recruits within their territory, but though the citizens approved and applauded the efforts of the Staters, few citizens

would give bodily support to their ambition. Within a week, nearly two hundred men had volunteered and were uniformed and armed with supplies which had come in by the Dublin Road, but the explosive destruction of Annacotty Bridge had cut off that supply line. Almost three weeks were to elapse before reinforcements of men and supplies were to come into the city by the Ennis railway. (To be continued).

# ALL IN THE MIND

BY  
DERMOT McEVOY

LET US begin by rinsing our minds. Now take a refreshing gulp of the Good News according to Richie Ryan: All his Budget taxes are voluntary! That is, you don't have to pay them because you don't *have* to drink, or smoke, or drive and so, readily and easily you avoid the new impositions! What about the less-than-saintly citizens who will continue to indulge their vices? Won't they put up the prices of their goods and services to meet the new charges? Richie and his allies do not say anything about that. No, this far too bland approach just will not do. Of course the money to meet the grave national deficit has to be found somewhere, but hoisting indirect taxes puts an unfair burden on the needy. Why are the rich allowed to escape? A capital levy in this emergency would not be out of place. Naturally that's not to be expected from the ranchers' man and his Labour allies, the limpets of office.

Not that the Budget is all bad. Dishing out the *deontas* is to be curtailed and about time too. To my own knowledge, farmers with the appropriate Poor Law Valuation—and land has not been revalued since the night of the Big Wind—have been drawing this pin-money though their creamery cheques were up to £300 a month and their children at university. And some farmers are at long last to be asked to pay income tax on their incomes just like any factory worker, bricklayer, teacher, or poor old Income Tax Inspector. As one might reasonably expect, farmers don't like the beginning of the end of their long tax-holiday. Addressing a conference of farmers at Rockwell College, Mr. Joe Rea, Chairman of the Farm Apprenticeship Board, saw the dawn of an era when farmers, like everyone else, would be paying their fair share as "killing confidence" and a "brake on expansion".

I must be old-fashioned because, though I never got round actually to liking Income Tax (though that's a deal better than having no income on which to be assessable) I never felt all that deeply about it, certainly never regarded it as a brake on expansion except, possibly, keeping me to beer and barmaids rather than to week-ends at the Burlington and lissom 'secretaries'. George Colley, the Fianna Fail spokesman on finance, did not, of course, see anything good in the Budget. Yet, despite intensive questioning on the '7 Days' programme, he did not suggest what Fianna Fail would do in Richie Ryan's position. Would he cut the *deontas*? Would he invite the farmers to pay taxes on their incomes? (If that is such an outrageous proposal, then the whole idea of Income Tax, a tax on incomes, is outrageous). Without much reflection it is easy to see that Colley & Co. have not got anywhere near earning my vote.

MORE THAN most I feel for Fianna Fail. It's sad not being around for the pickings that go with power. Especially when one reads of Gulf Oil and its 'slush' fund. The financial pages of the newspapers have been telling recently how the U.S. Government's Securities and Exchange Commission put Gulf through the legal wringer and had the company admitting that between 1960 and 1973 illegal pay-offs totalled £5.1m. These were passed through Bahamas Exploration and emerged as anonymous dollars in directors' discreet briefcases, to bribe top politicians all over the world. What has this to do with Fianna Fail? Why Gulf Oil was the company that paid for the round-the-world trip of Mr. Jack Lynch, T.D., when he was Taoiseach. And who's giving £18,000 to the G.A.A. in Cork towards the cost of the new Pairc O Caoimh? Why the answer is Gulf. Gulf Oil must have learned a great deal about hurling from a well-known ex-hurler to become all that generous.

That same oil company's slush money was given to political parties in return for favours rendered in Peru and Bolivia. Would Fianna Fail have handled such money for facilities, say, at Whiddy Island? Would any Fianna Fail ex-Minister have stooped so low? All could be made clear if the Fianna Fail Party would let us see an audited balance sheet and if the ex-Ministers submitted to a capital investigation. That'll be the day. Especially when Mr. Charles ('Champagne Charlie') Haughey will not even tell the Public Accounts Committee of Dail Eireann what happened to a miserable £100,000 of your

money and mine that never got to the relief of distress in Northern Ireland.

I TRUST you are as disturbed as I am about the cure for Limerick vandalism and hooliganism suggested by the Redemptorist Fathers, endorsed by the two Bishops of Limerick and supinely supported by the "better-class" (better off?) citizenry: *Up Guards and at 'em!* No one in his right mind condones the destruction of property; its more the methods by which it is acquired in the first instance that I am perturbed about. But cracking down on the symptoms and leaving the disease alone is not the way. Indeed, if I were Bishop, rather than coadjutor, local, acting, unpaid, a sort of British Army lance-corporal, I would first consider if the upsurge of youthful crime and violence was not, perhaps, a reflection on the moral teaching and guidance I'd given the diocese. Had I, for instance, failed to remind property owners of the duties to the citizen-at-large and concentrated overmuch on their so-called rights? Where is there, indeed, for Limerick youth to go other than roam the streets? Where are the youth halls, the youth leaders, the civic projects? Is there even a reasonably-priced cafe, or disco that young people can go to in the evenings? Of course not; there's no profit in that kind of thing. Limerick is in the process of waking up to the nightmare that this kind of neglect—apart from it being a grave sin of omission—brings its own revenges.

More Guards may well put down desperate youth but not for long. See Salazar's Portugal, Franco's Spain. Property owners and well-heeled shopkeepers would do well to bear in mind that every silver lining has its cloud, that every step forward has an ingent step backward built into it, that every gain incorporates a less, even though that loss may not be noticed by that particular individual at a particular time. Just as the physicists say you can't have action without an equal and opposite reaction. The situation needs more than Chief Supt. Kenny and his plain-clothes men can supply in a month of 17-hour interrogations with or without benefit of clergy—or wattles!

IS THERE a Limerickman who does not agree with Harold Wilson when he says that the people in the Republic would like the North to be 2,000 miles away? I doubt it, though he's probably too frightened to say so. Few people I know will face the consequences of the "shoot-out" so casually referred to by Tim Pat Coogan, editor of the Irish Press, on *The Late Late Show*. That's all he sees as likely to follow a British withdrawal from the North. H'm. Who would then provide jobs and Social Security benefits for the 10,000 Harland & Wolff shipyard men, who are kept in employment by British Government subvention, or take on the burden of industrial collapse elsewhere in Ulster? The answer the South will not face is that a united Ireland would mean a doubling of Income Tax and a hair-shirt economy for the whole struggling island.

All we can do, and should do, is recognise that there are two states of Ireland—and be glad of it! Let us not forget to call murder murder not just 'killing' as in the *Irish Press*. Indeed, the only time that mealy-mouthed rag called an IRA atrocity 'murder' was when the victim, Det. Sgt. O'Brien of the Special Branch, turned out to have been a veteran of the 1916 Rising. De Valera himself—he was Taoiseach—had to be telephoned before Frank Gallagher, Coogan's predecessor, reluctantly gave permission for the 'murder' I called it to appear in the paper. Come on Coogan! And while you're at it: doesn't shoot-out mean massacre? The fainthearted should remember the words of Willy Brandt when first the voice of Germany was heard in the General Assembly of the United Nations:

There is violence through tolerance, intimidation through indolence, threat through permissiveness, manslaughter through immobility.

Anything, Coogan, anything Limerick City Council is better than complacency.

I MENTIONED last month I'd come across a memento of

# THE "SOLDIER HUNTER"

DAYS OF THE  
"BOTTOM DOG"

## PART THREE

The Annual General Meeting of the Limerick Trades Council was held on 25th January 1918. Both Ben Dineen, secretary, and James Casey, treasurer, were re-elected unopposed and a resolution passed: "That this Council take up the matter of holding a Labour Day in Limerick".

A month later the first visit by women delegates to the Council was recorded. On Friday, 22nd February, Council chairman, John Cronin, introduced Mrs. P. Curran, organiser, Amalgamated Society of Tailoresses and Miss J. Fowler, Organiser, of the Women Workers' Federation.

"Both ladies received a hearty welcome from delegates and spoke at some length on the necessity for better organisation among women workers", Ben Dineen wrote into the minute book.

On 20th April, the "Bottom Dog" paid tribute to James Connolly when poet Maeve Cavanagh wrote:

*And one who ever in him found  
A steadfast champion of her cause  
Woman, by tyrant laws still bound  
Shall she not at his passing pause . . .*

Three weeks later the paper declared: "James Connolly was a B.D. and while working in the sewers of Dublin wrote the first chapters of 'Labour in Ireland'." The tribute concluded by asserting: "Labour must not wait in the hope that freedom will come to it in the slums. . ."

The success of the "Bottom Dog" gave rise to another small paper. It had a different purpose however. Titled "The Soldier Hunter", it was "called into existence for the purpose of giving publicity to some of the many scandals that occur nightly in our city. . ."

While the "Bottom Dog" continued to expose cases of injustice and fight for trade union recognition, the "Soldier Hunter" had no time for theories . . . the paper was out to clean up the town.

"The outskirts are barred at night to all decent citizens. They are the dens of infamy where immorality stalks naked and unabashed. Riotous and indecent behaviour is the nightly order . . . we are sick and tired of hearing appeals from the Pulpit".

"Social hygiene, if you will, is our object", declared the "Hunter". A priest figured in the first issue pointing out that a clergyman had been violently assaulted by a brutal Welsh soldier.

"The clergyman in question was only discharging his duty when he sought to protect a girl of 16 years of age against the lustful passion of this low clodhopper", wrote the priest.

The following story appeared under the heading "The Drugged Sweet".

*Incredible though it may seem, here in Catholic Limerick, many a young innocent girl has been made the victim of the*

*lowest class of outrage by some of those demons in human form. Quite recently in the back road, a young girl in the company of a British soldier was offered chocolates by him. Finding a peculiar taste she declined to eat them. Luck was on her side and had she used those chocolates she would now have sunk to the same depths of depravity as many others . . .*

In the midst of this hysteria the "Bottom Dog" battled on, waging the fight against the evils of Capital and trying to better the conditions of the poor people. Soon they would rally to a new cause. Labour Day was coming.

Sunday morning Mass bells shattered the silence of the early city. Ben Dineen was looking forward to the afternoon when he was going to address the working classes of Limerick.

Sally McGowan had heard the constant talk in the restaurant. There was to be a march through the city. But it did not concern her. She saw no future in Limerick and was thinking of going to America.

On the first Sunday in May the city observed Labour Day. Three platforms had been erected in the Market's Field where thousands of workers had gathered. Led by invited speakers and local union officials the march set off and a local newspaper reporter estimated that 15,000 took part, but the Trades Council modestly recorded that only 10,000 marched.

John Cronin, President, told the thousands of men and women that the main object of the demonstration was "to improve the conditions of the workers and all those dependent on them".

B.J. Dineen, secretary, said that the stronger the movement, the better they would be able to remedy their grievances. "All the workers wanted was frugal comfort . . . and not to be slaves in their native land. (Cheers)".

Amid a sounding trumpet, the workers of Limerick, in mass meeting assembled, extended fraternal greetings to their "Russian comrades, who have waged such a magnificent struggle for their social and political emancipation". To the noise of cheering, the resolution was carried, amid what the reporter described as "scenes of great enthusiasm".

After the celebration, the "Bottom Dog" asked some sober questions: "How many workers enjoy the pleasures of life? Ask the tenants living in hovels . . . and paying rent for houses unfit for human habitation. Ask the poor mother striving to make ends meet and never succeeding . . ."

Ben Dineen was absent from Trades Council meeting in June 1918 due to an illness. "The Worker" was on hand however on 19th August to record a historic event.

*Mr. J. Cronin welcomed the ladies of the ITGWU as delegates to the Council and said that by their presence, would contribute towards its dignity as a Labour movement in the city.*

(To be concluded).

Robert Emmet, a two-handled delicately chased cup. The inscription, which I've passed on to Arthur La Bern, who is researching a life of the hapless rebel, reads: "Anno 1803. The Committee for Conducting the Patriotic Fund of Ireland unanimously present this piece of plate to Lieut. Stewart Home Douglas, of the 21st Regt. of Foot, in testimony of the high esteem the Committee entertain of his spirited and meritorious services to the public on the Night of 23rd of July last in vigorously opposing and successfully discomfiting a daring and traitorous Insurrection in the City of Dublin."

Lieut. Home Douglas of the Regt. of Foot? Almost certainly a forbear of the British former Foreign Secretary of whom another Foot (Michael) wrote: "I've seen healthier faces on a pirate's flag."

Mention of Michael Foot, now British Minister of Labour, reminds me of an incident that occurred in my home recently. He appeared on BBC 2 in a books programme and a guest, Mrs. Maggie Keyes (nee O'Brien) said, "Why his uncle, the Rev. Mr. Foot, a Church of Ireland Minister at Tubber, Co. Clare, used

to drive us to Mass in Corofin early in the 1914-18 was and my father was reprimanded by Canon McInerney of Corofin for allowing us to be escorted by a Protestant." For that reason I was glad to be able to tell Mrs. Keyes and her assembled children—from the U.S., England and the Middle East—that times have indeed changed in Clare. I showed them the *Clare Champion* picture of the two Bishops of Killaloe, the Catholic and Protestant clergy and the point choirs of Ennis, gathered happily together for a Festival of Lessons and Carols at the Church of Ireland in Bindon Street. In my schooldays, a British ex-Serviceman of that same church was shunned by the townspeople for picking weeds on the very pathway the new ecumenists trod. He was not shunned by me: Was I an early ecumenist, or just plain indifferent? Neither; I used hang around that church to get a sight of my light o' love, a comely Protestant who used to steal sweets for me from her father's shop. A lifetime later we could still laugh over it on Hampstead Heath where the sweets were on me. Ecumenism can be fun.

# SHANNY'S PUB

Many of the Abbey fishermen were dedicated drinkers. After work, they liked to refresh themselves in the plentiful pubs within the "Parish". But they also travelled farther afield. Three sisters of the well known family of Abbey fishermen and market gardeners, the Shannys, kept a bar in Plassey. This pub became a regular rendezvous for the Abbey men and Limerick anglers.

In a recent issue of the *RTE Guide*, John Walsh described the way out of the city to Plassey:

*If you set out from the centre of Limerick on the Dublin Road, you will presently find a small river keeping you company on your left hand and a hump-backed bridge over it. A little way ahead you can see the beginnings of a canal, which sets out bravely towards Dublin but thinks better of it a mile on and cadges a lift from the Shannon. That way lies Plassey, the haunt and retreat of all those on the run from "respectability".*

In his work *The Fourth Siege of Limerick*, P.J. (Cushy) Ryan has given us his own distinctive description of Plassey itself and of its central attraction for many people – Shanny's Pub:

*An annual regatta was held at Plassey mills . . . being two miles from the city it had the attraction of country air and scenery . . . It was attended by family parties who started out around ten in the morning with ample stocks of food and cooking implements. They made a picnic day of the event. The roaring torrents of water rushing through the broken sluices and tailrace of the ruined Plassey mill gave the place a memorable air of romance and danger. In the afternoon, while the children sported or slept in the sun, some parents thirsty for adventure could cross the narrow black bridge to the Clare side of the river. They needed no mariner's compass to swing to the right by the river's bank. Two hundred yards from the bridge and fifty feet from the river, set in green fields, was a small low thatched house of refuge – Shanny's Pub. Some drank their pints in the pub or outside on benches; others filled some three-quart tin cans with the flowing gold and drank at leisure among the greenery.*

It is obvious from "Cushy's" tantalising tale that those who remember Shanny's Pub will not easily forget "the parlour splendours of that festive place". It had a peculiar attraction for all those who came to Plassey. Perhaps it was its unique location, its fairy-tale approach along the towpath by the river, across the plank over the drain and through the big field. It was a very special place to shelter in during squally October days, when the bridge was obscured by the incessant sheets of rain driving up from the south-west. The warmth within the walls, the lively conversation, the smell of stout and sawdust, and the friendliness of the Shanny sisters made the pub a haven for every Waltonian that ever plied line and lure in the river there. Known colloquially as "The Thatch", the house was a refuge of hospitality for every pilgrim out of Limerick and out of farmhouses and cottages from the surrounding countryside.

Perched boldly close to the river's edge, just above the Plassey Bridge on the Clare shore, the pub was a spiritual and temporal oasis for wayfarer and fisherman. A stranger might pass it by, pausing only perhaps to admire the lilac trees, or the roses that reached right up to the thatch, if his attention was not arrested by the legend painted on a wine-coloured board and fastened on the wall between the parlour window and the front door: Catherine Shanny, licensed to sell beer, wine and spirits to be consumed on the premises.

The Shanny sisters were daughters of an Abbey fisherman who secured his liquor licence through the good offices of the

*Sure 'tis many a tale that is told of this place,  
That has passed like its owners without a trace.*

(*"Shanny's"* by Kevin Hannan).

salmon angling gentry, with whom he was popular as a raconteur and paddleman. In those days, the success of the salmon angler depended on the skill and rivercraft of the paddleman. And who knew the river and the likely haunts of the salmon better than an Abbey fisherman?

The sisters had two brothers; one immigrated to Australia and never returned; the other was killed in a fall over the cliff at Plassey Mill dam while on his way home after taking ill while fishing with his crew above the fall.

Kate Shanny was probably the best known publican in the Limerick district in her day. Everybody knew her, and even when some of the city publicans set out on a busman's holiday, they strolled up the bank to Shanny's.

Kate was always careful to refuse drink to those whom she judged to have had enough. Ann, the younger sister, was second in command, though never allowed the principal part in the barrel-tapping ceremony. Kate was the boss, and Ann seemed happy enough to see the responsibility in some one else's lap. Mary (the Widow Cullinan), who came in between in age, took no part in the running of the bar, but spent most of her time complaining about the inclemency of the Irish weather. She had spent many years in America and was always referred to as "The Yank".

Kate and Ann were expert boatwomen and could manage a brecaun or angling cot with the best. They always kept their own boat. That the mighty winter floods held no terrors for them was proved in 1927 when the highest water in living memory isolated their home. Against all advice, they elected to stay, though they had to walk about the house on planks for several days. At that time, parts of Plassey bank were inundated and the water flowed through the hand railings of Plassey Bridge.

The Abbey fishermen rarely passed the door on their way upstream. It was usual to see a pair of brecauns pulled up on the grass below the house. Fishing rods resting against the thatch told their own tales.

*And the rods at the thatch,  
With the door on the latch,  
And Kate had no match  
For her speed to despatch  
A pint with frog's eyes,  
Or a whiskey to size.*

Fishing, whether by net or rod, is an activity that is invariably more rewarding if followed by a pint in congenial surroundings. And the Shannys provided an ample supply of this beverage.

*Anglers and Abbeymen sat here,  
To joke and chat and drink their beer.  
There was Todsie, Jim Kane, John Shanny and Cockrum,  
Rob, Riley, Randy, Napoleon and Bantrum.  
Gakes, Tawdy, The Shaun, Boar, Beaver and Bud,  
Lapping up enough beer that would make a good flood.  
Helped on by their buddies of that ancient clan,  
Dutch, Slobby, Susi and bold Paddy Tan.  
But the anglers well matched them in numbers and vigour,  
Conceding them little in swamping the liquor,  
There was Gallagher, Fitz, Jim Lane and Pa Healy,  
Pa Madden, Connell, Jim Ryan and Da Daly.  
Bolstered up in the game by Jack Close and Mick Hannan,  
Pat Morrissy, Lane, Jack Butler and Gannon.  
The company and chat were well worth the trip,  
For great lore and tradition were steeped in each sip.*

The turning point in the fortunes of Shannys occurred with the great tragedy of February, 1930, when three well known salmon anglers were drowned after their boat struck one of the piers of Plassey Bridge. It was said that Kate was never the same afterwards. Some of the anglers who had taken out licences to fish during that season never wet a line again.

Business continued for a few years but things were sadly changed. The gloom cast by the tragedy pervaded Plassey. Kate and Mary died in 1936, and were laid to rest with their ancestors in the old Churchyard of St. Mary's. Ann became the sole owner of the old home and soon attracted the close "attentions" what seemed an endless host of apparently dedicated friends. In less than two years, her fortune, which was said to be fairly considerable, was dissipated to the last farthing, and immediately afterwards her erstwhile "friends" vanished. The bar was closed for business in 1938, only a few months after the Abbey fishermen had left the river for ever. "The Tatch" had seen the golden days of angling on the river and died with the snap-net fishing. It went out forever with the brecauns.

Ann lived on for nearly twenty years in abject poverty, which was shared by the family's faithful companion, Kitty. When she died in the late fifties, Ann was laid beside her sisters in the Cathedral churchyard.

Shortly afterwards, the remains of the house were bulldozed by a local farmer. The sight of the razed pub evoked the following lines from an old angler who visited the scene.

*This is the spot where Shanny's stood,  
By the stream near Plassey wood.  
Here where the three sisters toiled,  
The nettles now grow, dank and wild.*

*No trace of thatch or garden bright,  
No welcoming windows or cheerful light,  
No clink of glass is heard within,  
Nor Kate's shrill voice above the din.*

*No voices in the evening air,  
Linger in this place so bare.  
Nothing but this mouldering mound  
To mark the pub on Plassey's ground.*

Another poetic epitaph of Shanny's was written by an anonymous fisherman and poet. Titled, An Old Angler's Dream, the verses convey all the sadness and nostalgia for Plassey and it's pub in times past.

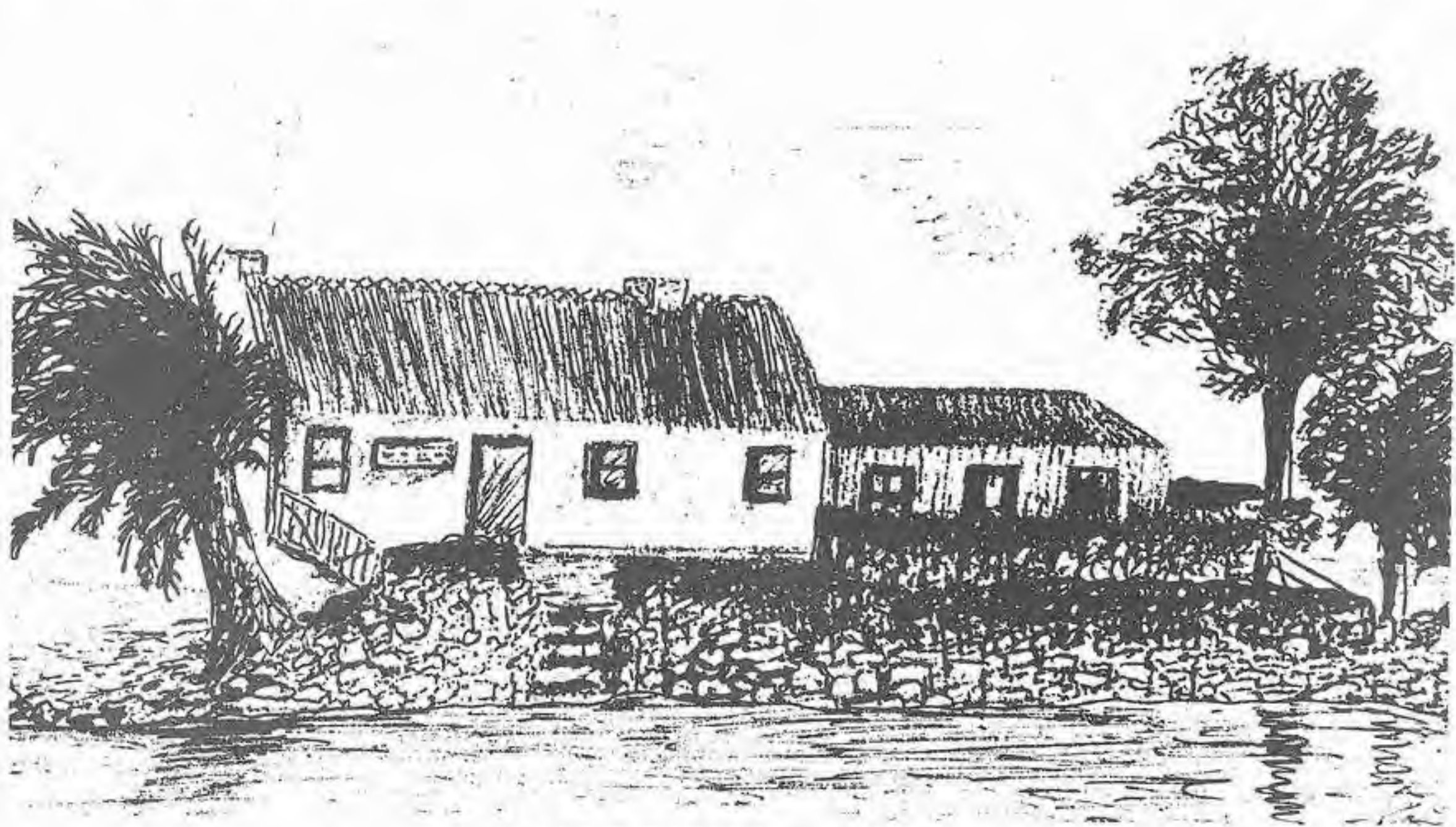
*I oft times think as my days draw nigh  
Of a pub near Plassey Mill,  
Of a field and hedge, all blossom starred,  
Where the anglers drank at will;  
And when the dark would shroud the scene,  
Hushing the merry din,  
Ann Shanny would look around and ask:  
"Well, boys, are ye coming in?"*

*'Tis many and many a year since then,  
And the pub near Plassey Mill  
No longer echoes the anglers' feet  
In the place so still, so still.  
I see it all as the shadows creep,  
Though many a year has been  
Since last I heard Ann Shanny ask:  
"Well, boys, are ye coming in?"*

*Those memories cling as the waters ring  
O'er the falls midst rocks and sand;  
Those islands small, past the Garrison Wall,  
And the angler with rod in hand.  
As the salmon leaps and the wild life peeps  
From shuttering rock and rill,  
I can hear Ann say, in her old dear way,  
"Well, boys, are ye coming in?"*

*I wonder when the great shadow falls  
On that last short earthly day,  
When we say goodbye to the riverside,  
All tired with fishing and play,  
When we step out in that other land,  
Where Peter so long has been,  
Will we hear him say as Ann Shanny of old:  
"Well, boys, are ye coming in?"*

(To be continued).



**SHANNY'S PUB**

# casey's column.... by John Casey

## THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

'Twas the night before Christmas, as the rhyme goes, but it wasn't Santa Claus I saw. No, a young tinker woman begging from door to door in the estate where we live. A lower middle class type of estate. Anyway, the tinker woman did her rounds. The response everywhere was the same. A door opened and quickly slammed shut. My mother gave her money and some clothes. The night after the big wind, a young tinker girl, Margaret, well known to us, walked 2 miles to the house. What did she want? Two candles. She said they had no light and that the previous night her husband had to lash the caravan to a pole while she and the twins sheltered under a tree. They did not re-enter the caravan until the wind had died down fearing that the storm would topple it. She must have passed 200 doors before she reached our house and either did not ask or was refused the candles. Earlier the same day, a beautiful dark-haired girl from Mayo visited us. She had with her two frozen, mud-spattered children. Their tent had been lifted and blown into the corner of a field.

My point: This is a Christian country and we cherish all the children of the nation equally — or so they keep telling us.

## THE SINN FEIN ARD FHEIS

I attended some public sessions of the recent Sinn Fein Ard Fheis. Purely personal observations lead me to think that Sinn Fein is a spent force. The average age of the delegates was around 24: some of these were talking with great revolutionary fervour. One wonders will they be still in the movement when they leave their colleges for cushy middle class jobs. No, it was the older people I watched and listened to: they talked, they talked at length but without spirit or real conviction. The policies and the general direction of the movement seemed to be more pragmatic more realistic but the leaders and activists are tired. This is easy enough to understand: they've been involved in two savage shoot-outs with the I.R.S.P. and the Provos. The leadership overreacted, deciding to destroy the I.R.S.P. This they failed to do and lost political standing. This was not improved by the Larry White affair and the shoot-out with the Provos.

The Officials are now trying desperately to regain political respectability. They have also come to realise that republicanism is an opiate and should be relegated to the French bourgeois revolution and that it was a vehicle by which the bourgeoisie overthrew the gentry and the nobility. The future of the Official Sinn Fein movement as a serious political party is dark.

## THE PROVOS

Someday somebody will make a comedy film (black comedy) on the Provos — "The Gang Who Could Shoot Straight or "We do shoot Prods, don't we?". "Freeman", the intellectual of "An Phoblacht", examines the case for stopping "Taigue" killers. He makes a case for killing Loyalists as a deterrent and let's it up to the I.R.A. to determine the ratio, mount a propaganda campaign and announce an all-out campaign with 600 lb-bombs.

Ruairi O Bradaigh's speech at the Sean South commemoration mentioned Tone and Emmet. One wonders how they reconcile lining non-political working class Protestants against a van and murdering them with Tone's dictum of unifying Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter. Mr. O Bradaigh also referred in his speech to the ordinary people of Ireland and of ending the exploitation and domination of these ordinary people. Is murder exploitation? Were the men in the van ordinary Irish?

"Freeman" (God protect us from his 'freedom') points out correctly that Loyalists, psychopaths, assisted by the U.D.R. and other agents of "law and order" in the North have been

killing Catholics. Undoubtedly. He neglects to balance this with the bombing and murder carried out by the Provos. One cannot understand the Provos without reference back to the warrior tradition in Irish history. The gunman, the spear-thrower was glorified. Irish history as taught to the 25-plus generation is a story of soldiers locked in defeat against the perfidious power of Britain. More fairy story than history. But young Provos have been suckled on this — the glory of war, nobility, of dying for one's country. Does anyone believe that there is not sympathy for the Provos amongst Christian Brothers and certain clerics?

When Mr. O Bradaigh refers to ordinary people he does not mean the Loyalists, because in spite of anything they may say to the contrary, the Provo war is directed firstly against the non-republicans and only secondly against the British Army. If the army left tomorrow the Northern question would not be solved. There would be a sectarian civil war.

What are the Provos killing for? Do they have visions of a new society? They have a document called "Eire Nua" which could be interchanged for Declan Costelloe's "Just Society"?

They are about as revolutionary as Ruairi O Bradaigh's pioneer pin and their policies and philosophy as dead as Emmet's head (Maire) Drumm's favourite image). No, the Provos are pan-Catholic nationalists: their aim (unstated) is to drive the million Protestants into subjection or to Britain. That's unity, and after that their job is finished. Anybody ever ask Ruairi about his visions?

Una Toal in the same issue of "An Phoblacht" berates Liam Cosgrave for taking to prayers. (This is unfair to Liam who's always been a praying man). She asks how Cosgrave could read the lesson at Blessed Oliver's canonisation and ignore the Pope's plea for the release of political prisoners. She accuses him of hypocrisy, pointing to the treatment of prisoners in Port Laoise. She even quotes scripture against him, "As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren you did it to me". All this goes to show how close Provisionalism is bound to Catholicism. The president of Maynooth, An t-Athair O Fiach, (a Crossmaglen man), is reported off the cuff as saying that every man with guts in Crossmaglen was in the Provos. Naturally he would hardly state this publicly.

Quoting scripture in a paper where gunmen and violence is glorified is amusing. If someone has to be murdered don't strangle him with a rosary beads and make it a corporal work of mercy!

## INDEPENDENT SOCIALISTS

Articles in this paper have promoted the idea of independent socialist candidates for the next general election. Not because Limerick has Jim Kemmy or because of any special virtue in non-party politics but because none of the parties can in themselves provide a semblance of a Socialist opposition. Recently the C.P.I. has split on a doctrinaire issue — four prominent members leaving to set up an Irish Marxist Society. Some of the left wing parties themselves have come to realise their individual ineffectiveness and are coming together at the Mansion House in early February to jointly propose a socialist alternative. The hour is late and their task is not an easy one.

## THAT THIRD BRIDGE — 10 YEARS AGO

Details of a new bridge to cross the River Shannon at Limerick (from Mallow Street to North Circular Road) were announced. The project would cost half-a-million pounds, was expected to start soon and the city Councillors urged that it be given priority treatment. ("Limerick Chronicle", January, 1966).